

BRIEFER ARTICLES

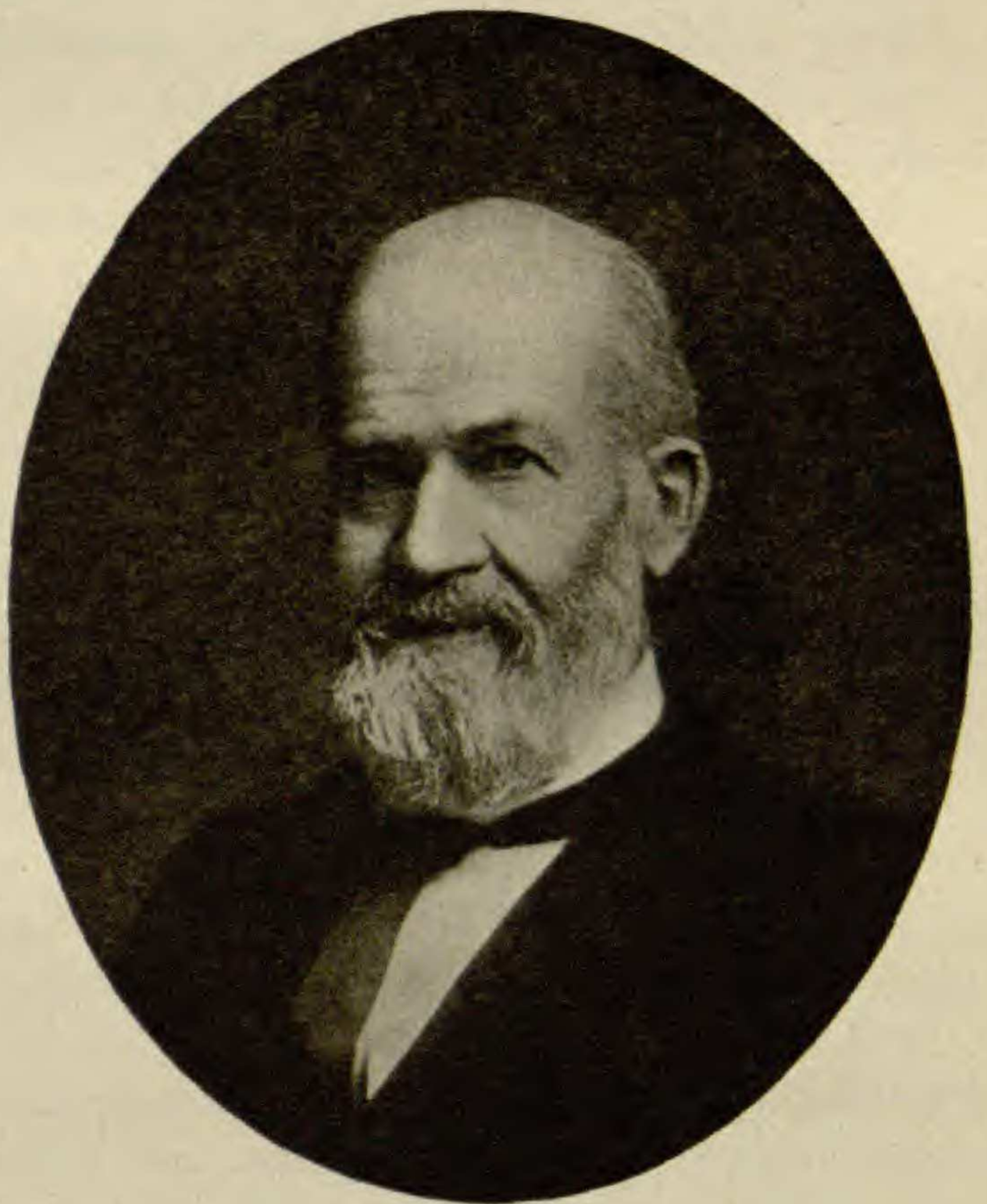
THOMAS JONATHAN BURRILL

APRIL 25, 1839—APRIL 14, 1916

(WITH PORTRAIT)

From the moment of recognition of "the new botany," as one of them called it, three men of the middle west have stood out in prominence: BEAL in Michigan, BESSEY in Iowa and Nebraska, and BURRILL in Illinois. Each has exercised an influence on American botany further reaching than those of their generation have recognized while it was active, and each has been a force outside the field of his chosen profession.

Professor BURRILL was a microscopist, in the days when microscopy was finding itself. Only a few months ago we picked out the faces of the active workers in that near science as they appeared in a group photographed nearly half a century ago. The museum of the University of Illinois devotes one wall case to a collection of the cheap microscopes that enabled a young and poor institution to show its students the things lying beyond the range of the hand lens, and the long tube binoculars that made the smallest of living things visible to the investigator. It was thus natural that, while he knew the old botany, published a list of the higher plants of the State, and continued until his death impatient of a lessening ability



in others to know them as he knew them, Professor BURRILL should have turned for his own productive work from these conspicuous beings to the smaller ones that grow as parasites on them. He has passed into the history of science as the discoverer, in the fire blight of fruit trees, that plant diseases, like animal diseases, may sometimes be caused by bacteria. Though it has given place long since to a more approved method, he introduced to the science a method of demonstrating the bacteria of tuberculosis in affected tissues, and up to the day of his short final illness he was working hopefully on a large unsolved problem in applied bacteriology.

My own contact with Professor BURRILL came over 30 years ago. I was working as a beginner on the parasitic fungi of Wisconsin; he, as a master, on those of Illinois. The correspondence was very helpful to me; it may have been helpful to him. His publications, though rendered less essential today through being replaced by more comprehensive or more readily accessible works, had the intrinsic value of originality and carefulness, and, as has been said by a friend since his death, one felt that he was writing on a subject of which he was a master.

It is only of late years that the University to which Professor BURRILL gave his life-energy has been stamping with its approval doctors majoring in his chosen field. To his inspiration, no doubt, the men who made pioneer mycological collections and studies in Illinois owe much: SEYMOUR, EARLE, WAITE, CLINTON, and others. A colleague has told me recently that, speaking approvingly of sabbatical year and similar provisions for study away from home, Professor BURRILL expressed his own sense of deprivation in never having been privileged to work in another man's laboratory. What he accomplished was doubly commendable because he did his work as a pioneer, breaking as well as blazing the trail to his goal.

Like most men of his type, Professor BURRILL was quite as useful outside his chosen profession as within its limits. Horticulture claimed his aid and was never refused. The "forestry" park of the University of Illinois is an enduring demonstration of his contention, long before the word ecology had been coined, that trees could be grown successfully on the prairie if the prairie sod was effectively broken up. The campus was planted by him, and he lived to see his saplings become large trees. Such a man could not escape administrative responsibilities. For most of his life he was Vice-President of the University; it was he to whom the trustees turned whenever an interregnum occurred, and his lasting affection for his chosen profession, and not their lack of appreciation of

his administrative talent, explains the fact that he remained in the chair of botany and did not stay in the executive offices.

As a teacher he was inspiring and beloved; as head of an important department, he possessed a breadth far beyond his own scientific activity; acting as regent, he won and held esteem as a man of unselfishness, fairness, and firmness. He is mourned as few men in his walk of life are mourned; the University pays him the highest tribute of respect and affection; and that the younger men of his immediate profession esteemed him as of their own and not of a by-gone day and generation is shown by a banquet in his honor given by the horticultural society of his State only a few months ago, and by his election at about the same time to the presidency of the National Society of Bacteriologists, and the chairmanship of the botanical section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. His passing leaves a void.—WILLIAM TRELEASE, *University of Illinois, Urbana, Ill.*